

FOOD AND CULTURE IN ARGENTINA:

Perceptions of plant-based diets, stigmatization of veganism and current challenges of activism to reduce (and end) animal consumption

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SUMMARY

This document aims to answer the questions:

- What are the cultural paradigms or fundamental drivers that support meat-eating in Argentinian culture?
- How is plant-based food and veganism perceived in Argentina?
- How can the paradigms be changed to promote a transition to a mainly plant-based diet?
- And finally, What are the most effective interventions to change the behavior of individuals toward the consumption of animal products?

I have divided the work into five parts. First, I give a brief introduction to the four key elements of social representations of meat consumption in Argentina. In other words, how can we describe the common sense knowledge of the majority of people (learned in the family but sustained by various institutions) that supports the consumption of meat. These elements are:

- 1) a belief system that supports meat consumption,
- 2) a profound stigmatization of veganism,
- 3) macro-narratives about meat and dairy products, and
- 4) a particular way of thinking and activism within the vegan community.

Part 1, the introduction, gives a brief sketch of what social representations are. Parts 2 to 5 (the 4 key elements) explain each of the elements and I give practical suggestions to overcome the problems described.

INTRODUCTION

To discuss the issue of reducing meat consumption we must first review the way people conceive of animals. Almirón and Tafalla (2019) state that the only way to contribute to the environment is through ethics and consideration for other animals. I examined this in my doctoral thesis, and I have updated it with situations and problems that Argentina is going through today.

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Meat eating responds primarily to existing (and circulating) social representations of the animals that people consider edible. What are social representations (SR)? SR are spontaneous, naïve knowledge, commonly called common sense (as opposed to scientific knowledge). This knowledge is formed from our experiences and from information that we receive and transmit through traditions, education, and social communication. It is thus socially elaborated and shared knowledge (Jodelet, cited by Araya Umaña, 2002). We understand things through the filter of these social representations. That is why it is so essential to understand the representations that circulate about meat consumption and vegetarian diets because that will allow us to know where to intervene to transform those representations.

There are four key elements in the social representations of meat consumption in Argentina.

1. A belief system that supports meat consumption
2. A profound stigmatization of veganism
3. Macro-narratives about meat and dairy products
4. Characteristics of a particular way of thinking and activism in the vegan collective

1. A BELIEF SYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS MEAT CONSUMPTION

There is a belief system which is invisible that supports the use and consumption of animal products. It is basically the opposite of veganism. It is called "carnism". The term was coined by the social psychologist, Melanie Joy, in 2001 when she noted that the lack of terminology around consuming animal products was part of the problem. Carnism is a very strong part of the national traditions in Argentina, with a long history of the use of cattle, for food, for producing objects and clothing, as a labor force, etc.

Society also legitimizes carnism in Argentina: the consumption of meat is representationally linked to **wealth, abundance and health**, and also to popular festivities and to get-togethers with family and friends (Navarro, 2016). Not eating meat is associated with **poverty, malnutrition, weakness and disease**, and vegetarianism in males is often used to joke about their lack of virility (González, 2019)¹. At present, for example, the economic situation prevents the weaker social sectors from buying meat, and the television media have shown people begging, saying that they were "forcibly vegetarian." They explain this situation with a robust negative message about marginality, state abandonment, malnutrition and extreme poverty. One of the phrases used popularly to celebrate a possible change of government is that "we will eat roast again²." The cow, moreover, in Argentina, is an animal that is linked to a shared idea of national identity (the cow country, Argentine beef).

2. PROFOUND STIGMATIZATION OF VEGANISM

In Argentina, there is a **profound stigmatization of veganism** (as including the defense of animals), something that does not happen even with strict vegetarianism. For this reason,

¹ In fact, in the *asados*, the barbecues of roast meat, it is the man who is in charge of cooking the meat, and the women in charge of salads.

² We must also clarify that the most disadvantaged social sectors in Argentina have access only to public healthcare, with traditional doctors who generally do not support a meat-free diet (Andreatta, 2017). Likewise, blood concentration tests for B12 and homocysteine are costly and are practically never covered by healthcare insurance schemes. In the same way, access to vitamins or supplements for these social sectors is almost impossible, due to their cost (and anyway, they consider reducing meat consumption as something negative).

to approach reducing meat consumption as an initiation of vegetarianism will be much more potent than encouraging it as "veganism".

These are the *most important* preconceptions that people have:

— **They consider that individual efforts make no real impact.** This perception is problematic and recurrent. When giving up meat is linked to the possibility of achieving an expected objective (not killing animals, taking care of the planet), and not to the practice/process itself (deciding not to be part of the farming practices), everything is reduced to apparent short-term success. Focusing the possibility of adopting a new practice on its success (reaching the final objective) dilutes the decision. There is also the idea that real changes (such as reducing or abandoning meat consumption) can only take place at a structural level (with the end of the capitalist system), which, although it may be true, is unlikely in the short term. Argentine culture values success very much. An objective or goal is valuable when it is attainable, and even more so if the result of the effort is seen quickly. Measuring the real impact of individuals not eating meat is complex, and that makes many people feel that participating in the process is not relevant or not sufficiently impacting. Measures are sought that will have visible results in the short term.

— **Animal rights are valued as non-transcendent.** In Argentina, poverty has risen to 35.4% and now affects 15.9 million people, who do not have enough income to cover basic needs. Extreme poverty is deepening, and deteriorating living conditions. Low-income strata cover 40% of the population (data from INDEC, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses). A large percentage of the new poor is middle classes who have not been poor before. Within this framework, discussing "why to stop eating meat" is understood by various social sectors as the political will to deprive the poorest segments of access to food. In Argentina, people consider meat as a staple food, seeing it as abundant (because this is "the cow country"), and to take it away from people is to violate their rights. Likewise, trying to remove milk or meat from the menus of community canteens is a problem, and even more so in the current context. It is also frowned upon to offer replacements. Milk (and dairy products) are seen by most people as fundamental in feeding during childhood.

— **The link between meat consumption and other problems is not understood.** There is no understanding of intersectionality with other problems (environment, health, feminism). Unfortunately, this problem is common to both people who eat meat and the vegan community. The vegan collective does not always make the effort to make intersectionality visible, which could mobilize the interests of diverse people and bring them closer to consuming plant-based diets. Much of vegan activism in Argentina makes considerable efforts to detach veganism from other causes, without realizing the power that there is in these movements. Many people will never care about animals. They also do not know how livestock production impacts on a planetary level, and on equity in access to food. Animal rights are seen as something trivial, as shown in the mockery, stigmatization, and the labeling of the vegan as "deviant," considering their struggle as minor, unimportant and even crude.

— **They dissociate environmental problems from meat consumption.** The link between meat consumption and the environment is practically non-existent in the hegemonic mass media, and so ordinary people are not aware of the issue. This problem worsens because environmentalist collectives do not want to be identified with vegans (and vice versa) in a struggle for meaning that does not contribute to the cause of either. It was only this year that the House of

Senators approved (on July 17) a bill on minimum environmental budgets for adapting to and mitigating global climate change. The text of the law mentions greenhouse gases but **does not say anything specific about livestock production policies**³.

—— **Veganism is considered as a frivolous fashion, proper to an affluent social class** that can choose what to eat, and can pay for alternative products or seeds. Products alternative to meat are not readily available in any supermarket in Argentina; they are challenging to obtain and often expensive. On September 18 of this year, Argentina extended the Food Emergency Law 27.345⁴ until December 31, 2022, due to the critical situation that our country is going through, where the rate of indigents is enormous, and 5 million Argentines eat only once a day. Within this framework, the current discussions revolve around the fact that "eating cannot be a privilege," that "eating should be cheap," and that the quality of food is essential. The text of the law does not mention what food should be covered by the state for the women, children, disabled and the elderly below the poverty line (in community kitchens, school canteens, community eateries). However, given the importance of meat in Argentina, and complaints that community kitchens receive meat only once a week, it is very likely to be included.

—— **Veganism is perceived as a renunciation.** To stop consuming foods of animal origin is linked by ordinary people with renunciation and deprivation: renunciation of pleasure (usual foods, pleasant taste, satiety), of variety (of foods to choose, and nutrients), of convenience (easily deciding what to eat, availability of food). We must point out again that, as the vegan diet excludes all animal products from the menu, it is considered much more restrictive than the vegetarian diet (which is generally perceived not as strict vegetarian, but as lacto-ovo vegetarian). Satiety is one of the fundamental variables for those who consume meat, and food based on vegetables would not meet this criterion (it's associated with thinness, weakness, food "that never fills"), and in the popular imagination is associated only with salads, for lack of knowledge about ways of cooking and specific recipes. Another determining perception is the renunciation of convenience. That the basic act of eating requires effort or complexity is generally perceived negatively. Finally, meat and dairy products are seen as familiar, good and pleasant foods, which they cook and eat as part of everyday life. Lastly, the shared representation is that vegan nutrition implies a renunciation of nutrients necessary for health, and this is a central issue, given the importance of health in the general population. Thinking of them as lacking in nutrients, they consider them incomplete. The question of combining foods to make their nutrients bioavailable is also complex for those who have never had contact with these issues.

³ The law declares a climate emergency in all the national territory until the year 2030. It seeks to establish strategies, measures, policies, and instruments related to the study of impact, of vulnerability, and of activities to adapt to climate change that can guarantee sustainable development and ecosystems. It aims to assist and promote the development of strategies for mitigating and reducing greenhouse gases in the country. Finally, it seeks to reduce the vulnerability of humans and natural systems to climate change, protect them from its adverse effects, and take advantage of its benefits. The text of the law is available at <https://www.hcdn.gob.ar/proyectos/proyecto.jsp?exp=2561-D-2019>

⁴ The text of the Law is available at <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/75000-79999/76578/norma.htm> and the updated text of the Norm at: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto-108-2002-71694/actualizacion>. The Law lists the State's obligations concerning food and the food and nutritional security of the population, and establishes an "emergency increase of at least 50% of the current year's budget appropriations corresponding to national food and public nutrition policies".

3 MACRO NARRATIVES ABOUT MEAT

Macro narratives are those "great narratives" that circulate in the common sense of people, and that guide them in the moment of making decisions. It is what is heard in the family, the media, among friends, what is remembered from school, the discourses that circulate in socially legitimated institutions. In relation to meat consumption, these macro-tales are sustained by four strategies: **avoidance, justification, creation and legitimization of fictions** and the **institutions that contribute to the legitimization of carnism** (Joy, 2013).

3.1 Avoidance

Avoidance makes the violence behind certain practices invisible, and also the violence hidden behind words, phrases, or choices that we use daily without thinking about them.

The first thing avoidance does is make carnism invisible. It helps to make meat consumption appear to be a behavior that is not governed by values, that has existed since remote times, that meat will always be eaten, and that abandoning this habit is impossible. It also sustains the implicit contract between meat producers and their consumers (Barruti, 2013) to invisibilize practices (or hinder access to information), including the exploitation of animals in cruel conditions and the damage to the environment. Without access to complete information about meat production processes, and all that this implies for animals, humans and the environment, **people are not free to question eating meat and cannot make informed decisions about it**. Also, when revelations about the meat industry succeed in raising awareness, this symbolic invisibility neutralizes the memory of the information received. Thus, for consumers, sensitization lasts a while, and then they forget and come back to consuming meat.

Finally, it helps to make the environmental consequences of meat production invisible so that people consider that its consumption is not one of the main problems of the planet (Waynes and Nicholas, 2007).

3.2 Justification

The **justification** of meat consumption is explained in the three "N's" proposed by Melanie Joy (2013): consuming meat is **normal** (considered "socially accepted and acceptable"), **natural** (typical of human physiology) and **necessary** (according to the health discourse). In Argentina, one could add another N: consuming it is "**national**," not only in terms of identity but also in the perception that livestock production is the economic base of the Nation. For the average Argentine, eating "without meat" is not a meal: meat "is the classic food of our country, according to traditions that have been transmitted through generations and in a certain way (together with other characteristics) make our identity." People do not question festive foods, and totem dishes (Contreras Hernández and Arnáiz, 2005) even less so. *Totem dishes* are opportunities for remembrance and emotion. They serve to transmit an idea of belonging, which will later work for emotional memory in the next generation.

If you ask any Argentinean what food is national, he will answer "asado", "empanadas salteñas" (a pasty filled with chopped meat), etc. All of these contain meat. Cooking with meat is part of the national identity, which is why it is hugely problematic for ordinary people to associate food that they see as "fine" with climate disaster and violence against animals.

3.3 Creation and legitimization of fictions

Another crucial aspect of macro narratives about meat is the **creation and legitimization of fictions**.

1. The first fiction is that the economic system of Argentina is **sustained by livestock production and meat consumption**.

2. The second is that **empathy for animals** can be imposed. It is a problem when activism tackles the reduction of meat consumption using "love for animals", since many people do not and will not feel empathy for animals they consider edible. It is essential to approach the issue with respect: respect that can be toward animals, but can extend toward the planet, and toward fellow humans, whose lives are made miserable because their environments are polluted and they have less access to drinking water and food when they choose to sustain meat consumption (Steinfeld et al, 2009).

3.4 Institutions that contribute to the legitimization of carnism

According to Joy (2013, p. 97), two institutions play a crucial role: **the legal system**, the **media**. In Latin America, we must add the **health system**, the formal **education system**, and **religion**.

— The **legal system** in Latin America locates animals as things. Colombia has included in its laws the category of sentient beings, but those that address abuse and welfare do not apply equally when "foodstuffs" are concerned. In general, they only apply to the closest animals (dogs, cats, horses) and wild animals (e.g., Colombia's Law 1774 of 2016). In Argentina, Law 14.346 applies to all animals, but it is rarely applied, although it is used for complaints (Pezzetta, 2019).

— The **media** in general ridicule not eating meat (even more so in the case of veganism), inviting underrepresented health professionals unaware of current thinking. These advocate meat-based diets, reinforcing the importance of its consumption, and influence public opinion about what the plant-based diet entails, sowing ignorance, mistrust, and ridicule. The vegans invited by the media are generally those with a controversial profile, thus legitimizing the idea that veganism is typical of people "who are not well" and de-legitimizing the movement.

— The **health system** in Argentina (especially) rejects the idea of abandoning meat consumption. In general, those who choose not to eat meat are described by health professionals as people with eating disorders: orthorexic or anorexic, for example. The health discourse supports the consumption of red meats, in moderate quantities, although warning about the problems that excessive use brings, and only advise giving it up in cases of disease (cancer). This is what most discourages the general public. The medical discourse (discourse of authority) supports the idea that it is necessary to consume animals and their derivatives. Therefore, it is complicated to eradicate this idea. Searching on the Internet, it is complex to recognize reliable sources, and the validity or scientific rigor of published research. *The scarcity of health professionals updated about plant-based diets* (Andreatta, 2017), and the lack of local information or a map of doctors and nutritionists who can guide in this topic, is worrying. In general, health professionals have had a traditional training and can accompany vegetarian diets, but do not have specific training to attend a vegan transition or vegan diets.

— The **formal education system** perpetuates speciesism (the idea that being human is a good enough reason for human animals to have greater moral rights than non-human animals) and,

although it allows for some concessions, does not make fundamental curricular modifications. Thus, it works on the environment but does not articulate this with food. It speaks of animals and their mistreatment but does not address the situation of those perceived as edible. When students are young, eating meat is not tackled, so as to respect the food decisions of their parents. In secondary school, although they are no longer young students, they are still minors, whose diet is decided by their parents. Because there is no free will in childhood, and the hegemonic menu includes meat, the theme is not incorporated in the curriculum. Moreover, in Higher Education, especially that oriented to animals (Veterinary Sciences, Agronomy, and Agricultural Sciences, Law, Pharmacy, Biochemistry), assumes them as resources for the benefit of the community.

— **Religion**, embodied in the two most influential churches in Latin America: the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Churches, influences not only through formal religious education but mainly at the cultural level, even in the secular sectors of society. Although similar in lines of doctrine, they identify themselves as different from each other and dispute for their faithful. The Bible, one of the most popular books in the history of humanity, highlights in its stories - known by religious and laypeople alike - the predominant role of men as subjects, as opposed to women, slaves, animals, and nature as "things" (Suárez and Pérez Pejic, 2019). This unequal relationship offers symbolic support to the consumption of meat, and to human dominion over nature for whatever humans need. Although different books of the Bible lend themselves to varying interpretations on the part of their faithful (in favor and against eating meat) they are generally used to legitimize this consumption⁵.

4. VEGAN COMMUNITY

Concerning the characteristics of a particular way of thinking and doing activism in the vegan collective, there are some problems faced by activism related to the representational issues I discussed earlier, and I will propose possible solutions:

1st) Confusing information with communication and learning. To believe that activists providing information (even if it is complete and detailed) is the same as communication (social construction of meanings) or learning is a mistake. Activism commonly assumes that providing accurate information is enough. Also, some academics (Fernández, 2019) defend exposing people to bloody images. The truth is that information processes are far from being learning methods. Information can be the first step to learning about a subject. However, to produce social meaning, information processes must be imbued by meanings shared by society as a whole. Moreover, in general, people are reluctant to expose themselves to violent images because they "don't want to know" (Joy, 2013; Navarro, 2016; Almirón 2019). It is vital to bear in mind that: a) ordinary people do not trust the news provided by non-hegemonic media, b) they distrust the word of activists because they consider them fundamentalists, c) they believe the word of socially legitimized figures to provide information (professors, doctors, lawyers, recognized figures in the scientific field).

I recommend two strategies to solve these three problems:

⁵ For example, 1 Corinthians 10:25 Reina-Valera 1960 (RVR1960) "25 Of all that is sold in the butcher's shop, eat, asking nothing for reasons of conscience," etc.

1. **To offer non-formal learning workshops, open to the community, ideally within the framework of a prestigious university.** Activist organizations can support these, but I suggest organizing them with the participation of teachers, doctors, nutritionists, and lawyers. They will be able to offer information based on material published in recognized spaces, which people can access to consult during the workshop and continue learning from afterward. In addition, these workshops should have the participation of communicators, who can work with the participants (as an "authorized word") explaining about the media construction of reality, the creation of agenda-setting, the management of public opinion. They can facilitate the recognition that hegemonic media generally respond to economic interests, and that therefore one cannot speak of "truth" or "objectivity". Professional work teams must coordinate these workshops, to ensure they have an image of legitimacy, and they must be free of charge. They must be offered in simple language, accessible to families, students, and adolescents. Donors should focus on funding projects of academic groups that can provide courses such as these (I will develop other ideas for educational processes for professionals later on).
2. **To enter the hegemonic media with paid, quality propaganda that addresses the issue of reducing meat consumption but in a particular way.** In Argentina, the only way to create meaning that crosses all social sectors is through local customs and practices. This is the strategy of successful feature films, powerful political campaigns, and advertisements that mobilize ordinary people. In Argentina, it's from traditional customs that the public "falls in love."

1°.a Those who decide to give up eating meat **face a solitary and often painful process that may involve loss of affective networks** (family, friends and colleagues who consume meat and in general do not understand the processes that those who decide to give it up go through), and their own ignorance about how to carry out an unknown way of eating.

1°.b **Vegan activism perceives a slow transition to a plant-based diet as a lack of understanding of the importance of giving up animal consumption.** For that reason, they discredit gradual changes in diet (such as first initiating lacto-ovo-vegetarianism, then quitting dairy, finally eggs, etc.).

A solution to these two problems would be:

1. The creation of **cartographies of vegan nutritionists in Latin America**, where a virtual map gives you access to updated and precise information about vegan nutritionist doctors, where they can be found (address, telephone, e-mail), whether they attend with mutual or pre-paid medicine (and which ones). It is vital that this be carried out for the whole of Latin America, and be done by communicators, doctors, and nutritionists, with at least one professional per country involved, since it entails a great deal of work.

2. **Creation of Virtual Knowledge Communities (VKC), as a strategy of strengthening virtual containment networks.**

Facebook closed groups for vegans are often intolerant towards people who are making the transition. Although they are intended to accompany, many responses to queries are loaded with intransigence and, worse still, ignorance (discrediting the importance of B12 supplementation, indicating - without being doctors, offering vegetable milk to newborns, etc.). The creation of VKCs would involve the development of a virtual platform. There, vegans, vegetarians, people who are starting a plant-based diet, and health professionals who are experts in plant-based diets, would be able to generate responsible exchanges about the transition, share knowledge and recipes, and have a free and professional space where they can resolve concerns. Given the cultural diversity existing in Latin America, it would be ideal if the platform allows people to log in according to their country of origin. This will enable those guiding and responding to understand the needs, possibilities, and impossibilities of each country.

3. **Creation of personal containment spaces.** In Latin America, people easily lose their affective networks when they stop consuming animals. These may change for virtual ones, but this is something that not many people can sustain. There is a need for personal spaces for sharing moments of exchange and talking in private, closed groups, to meet people who are going through the same concerns, to enter and converse without being judged or criticized, where affective bonds can be generated, food spaces can be shared, etc., similar to the **tribes of mothers**⁶ (Betina Suárez, 2018; among others). In Argentina, it would be ideal to use the concept to create different "tribes." Such tribes could be: 1) people who are new to veganism, 2) parents with vegan children, 3) pregnant women who want to sustain their veganism, etc. Ideally these tribes would have one or two people experienced in the subject (not necessarily professionals) and one or two professionals (psychologists or nutritionists).

1°. c Another major problem facing activism is when **they consider that giving up the consumption of animals and their derivatives should only be "for the animals."** One of the main issues is that of understanding the link between reducing meat consumption and other social struggles. Many activists do not consider it valid that a person wants to do it for their health, for the sake of the environment, for equity in access to food for millions of people (Steinfeld et al, 2009). However, it is essential to keep in mind that there are many people for whom animals identified as edible do not generate empathy (and never will). Expecting that a change to plant-based diets will be made only for the animals is reductionist and short-sighted. It also prevents strategic alliances being made with other movements. At present, only the coalition with specific feminisms is growing; but neither is this an alliance accepted by all-vegan activism.

⁶ Tribes of mothers are created for mothers who are raising their children alone to have a space for meeting other mothers in the same situation. This eases interchange with people who are having the same experiences and know what the other person is going through, so they can support her, give her advice and words of encouragement.

Therefore, I recommend:

1. **Educating within activism on the importance of adopting plant-based diets, for whatever reason makes sense to each person.** It is a mistake to try to homogenize motivations or goals for adopting a plant-based diet. The important thing is to find these motivations (Andreatta and Camisassa, 2017), strengthen them, and keep them alive. For this, it is fundamental for activists to understand that it is urgently necessary to generate alliances with other movements with the purpose of collaborating in ending the consumption of animals, thus posing this issue from different possible perspectives. Currently, one strategic partnership is the environmental movement, which is steadily growing and gaining many followers.

I would like to deepen this last suggestion and articulate it with another problem, which is:

2º) The lack of professionalization of activism, with dispersed, dissociated and sometimes even contradictory strategies that give an image of improvisation. Activism in Latin America lacks professionalization. In general, very few groups work in an organized, strict manner. Unfortunately, jealousy abounds over the ability of some to reach others more efficiently, and time is wasted in criticizing the actions of colleagues. Many activists also have high profiles, but violent characteristics, or have little capacity to handle the media, and they are then cited in the hegemonic press to ridicule the movement.

To solve **the problems mentioned above**, I recommend:

1. **Creating international educational spaces aimed at professionalizing activism, run by recognized and little-questioned figures.** This may seem minor, but it is crucial to generate exchanges between activists from different countries, precisely because mistrust between groups within the same country tends to be high. One option is to conduct a prior survey of high-profile people in activism to find professionals who would be respected. The figures in charge of these spaces must speak Spanish fluently since English is not a language that activists generally handle. These educational spaces should ideally be free and face-to-face. Virtual contacts, although useful, do not generate the closeness and emotion that comes from being able to share days with a professional activist who is recognized and admired. I suggest two types of well-defined spaces:
 - a. Spaces that aim to bring **current academic debates** closer to the common ground of activism. Creating reading and training groups avoids fanaticism and stimulates the ability to think about the problem from different approaches. They facilitate the discussion of urgent issues beyond “common sense”, and bypass

sterile debates that only move the focus away from the critical problems. This also helps to overcome the idea that street activism has nothing to do with what is being considered in academia. Finally, these groups would educate on how to check the sources cited, and not cite dubious science.

b. Spaces that aim to **professionalize activism in Latin**

America. For this, some strategies are vital:

- I. To guide on how to handle interviews in the media, taking care of personal image and the use of language, and on image construction in social networks, etc. This will enable an image of legitimacy and solvency to be projected for the general public who are not familiar with the issues of changing eating habits.
- II. To select **the most solvent figures** within activism **to give interviews**. To plan the topics to address and the issues to avoid, and develop specific strategies to bring the conversation to the areas of interest.
- III. To encourage activists **to mention different academics** when giving media interviews. Often the media do not know whom to refer to and activists rarely say who is working on these issues in the field of research. This is important for two reasons: 1) to demonstrate that activists are aware of the latest developments in the issue, and 2) to overcome in practice the misgivings between activism and academia.
- IV. To organize **citizen education workshops**, teaching about criminal law, how laws are applied, how and where to present a bill, etc.
- V. **To recruit professionals who can help activists to avoid burn-out**, teach them how to detect the signs and move at a time of wear and tear in militancy, and teach self-care practices to sustain activism in a healthy and prolonged manner.

2. **To link activism with professionals with authority in their different fields of knowledge, with competences in the themes of animal defense, environmentalism and diets based on plants.** Within activism, there are few figures of repute in these topics, which is why there is a general image of a group of rather uninformed young people, or extremists, who can rarely explain fluently the issue before them. Linking diverse activist groups with respected academic figures, who publicly recognize the work of activists, is an excellent contribution to activism.

For that it is suggested:

- a. **Put activism in context.** In Argentina, there are huge differences between the national and provincial capital cities and the interior of the provinces in terms of access to information and to food, and in prices of food. Being vegan in Buenos Aires is not the same as being vegan in a village in Catamarca. Activists frequently present demands that may be accessible in some places but, in others, are practically impossible. Also, unfortunately, in Argentina, there is little professional activism; and conventional activists require "perfect veganism" for being part of the community.
- b. **Installing debate in the political arena.** Given the impact of food methods on the environment, decisions about food are no longer personal: the discussion has to take place at the political level. The authorities must urgently assume their responsibilities and guide the population in adopting sustainable diets. Policies must be developed that encourage the consumption of vegetables and fruits, and to sustainably improve their production (Arrieta, 2014). Some municipalities in Argentina finance agroecological fairs where farmers offer their products directly to consumers. In La Plata, the University's policy is to fund projects that facilitate these practices, and the fairs are held in university courtyard. They provide information about the production processes of vegetables and fruits, and prices are significantly lower than in shops. Some farmers offer delivery services.

3°) The lack of incidence of the topic in education. In Latin America, an alliance between activism and academia is urgent, to generate reciprocal learning. Understanding this is vital, because people in formal education. While other strategies can have great impact, people rarely question the education provided by schools and universities. Therefore, donors should focus on influencing or financing projects that enable these topics to be included in the official curricula, to generate the greatest effect.

Possible solutions are:

1. **In Initial and Primary Education**, the focus should be on teacher training. The urgency of reducing meat consumption, which seems obvious to a specialist, is unknown to most of the population of the region⁷.
2. **In Secondary Education**, to explore at curricular level which subjects can formally include this topic. In Argentina, among other possibilities, the subject "Construction of Citizenship" could be oriented environmentally. This subject is required for the first three years of secondary school. Projects could be funded for specialist teachers to develop pedagogical proposals that address the reduction of meat and animal product consumption in a **crosscurricular manner**, and make

⁷ This becomes visible in intensive face-to-face teacher training days, where the catering provides vegetarian options that are less than 10% of the total options, and vegan options are 2%. There is also enormous waste of food and disposables.

these proposals available to schools for use in classrooms. These may include didactic strategies and educational materials, thus facilitating their work. These could go hand in hand with the possibility of scoring teacher training and provide links to essential articles to teach correctly.

3. **In University Education**, to create undergraduate and graduate courses that address the subject. Also, to facilitate and financially support the creation of specializations within the framework of state universities. Donors should provide funds to support the creation of specific programs to present in prestigious universities.
4. **Fund projects that promote or gain access to formal education spaces** (kindergartens, schools, tertiary institutes, universities). There is little or no funding to allow specialist teachers and academics to share their knowledge in educational settings, reaching a large number of families.
5. **In Argentina⁸, to finance programs and projects of academic updating (teacher training) at all levels of education, awarding points to teachers.** In Argentina, access to jobs in public educational institutions (for initial, primary, secondary and tertiary levels) is by score. Each teacher graduates from university with a minimum score and adds more points by attending teacher-training courses with scores. These courses are expensive, except when offered free by the State. I suggest launching a platform of teacher-grade courses, oriented to the topics of interest (environment, plant-based diets, ideas about meat, speciesism), free of charge for teachers. This would provide a gateway for many teachers into topics they might not otherwise have contact with. Such courses generally require, for awarding points, the implementation of a specific work in the classroom.

Possible strategies could be:

- a. **Finance projects that allow teacher trainers to offer courses from State platforms.** In Argentina, the Ministry of Education provides these courses free of charge to teachers, but only on topics of primary interest to the State (Language, Math, etc.). Presenting other courses is possible, but teacher trainers must provide funding for this type of project⁹. It is crucial that donors are able to collaborate on such projects.
- b. **Promote the financing of projects aimed at the creation of e-learning platforms, of courses for teachers with points**, created by recognized academic teams, responsible for

⁸ The ways of training teachers in public educational institutions are very variable in Latin America. I describe the Argentine case, which is the one I know perfectly because I work in that system and because I am a teacher. But it would be essential to generate knowledge on a country-by-country basis so that this strategy (of bringing the subject into the education system at all levels of education) is applicable in the whole region.

⁹ I have this information first hand because I work in the National Ministry of Education, in the National Institute of Teacher Training (in the department of Academic Updating) and I am in contact with those who decide which courses are carried out and with what financing, with which selection strategies, etc.

selecting the teaching staff, guiding the assembly of pedagogical proposals, reviewing teaching strategies, and monitoring the process. Financing would enable these platforms and their support, with an economic stimulus that helps to pay the teaching teams.

- c. **Pay for postgraduate courses for university teachers**, on how they can include the issue in the curriculum planning for their subjects.
- d. **Collaborate in funding congresses that enable interchange between academics and teachers devoted to the teaching of these subjects.**
- e. **Collaborate in financing the translation of books and articles into Spanish.**
- f. **Finally, as a supreme objective, to finance projects aimed at founding educational institutions whose guidelines include working for the reduction of the consumption of products of animal origin.** In Argentina, there are experiences of schools with Waldorf pedagogy (and mixed alternative pedagogies) where families work together to reduce the consumption of sugary foods, ultra-processed foods, and white flours. Children receive healthy snacks, and there are monthly workshops for parents explaining the importance of encouraging these behaviors at home. There are also cooking workshops for parents and children, and the children cook at the school. This creates support groups and promotes strong internal cohesion among parents of children attending school. However, these institutions do not focus on reducing the consumption of animal products. It would be interesting to start a project from kindergarten, creating the subsequent courses as the children move from grade to grade. This project would work with the idea of reducing meat consumption from the beginning of education, including parents in the process. Children and their families could learn the importance of reducing the use of foods of animal origin, respect for all animals, the environmental impact of our food decisions, etc.

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